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GENERAL DISCUSSION ON PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21, FOCUSING ON THE CROSS-SECTORAL COMPONENTS OF AGENDA 21 AND THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Overview of other follow-up processes to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development relevant to the work of the Commission

INTRODUCTION

1. The present document provides information on progress achieved to date on the two conventions that were open for signature during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as well as the main intergovernmental processes emanating from Agenda 21 and currently being carried out in parallel with the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

I. UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

2. On 21 March 1994, 90 days after receiving its fiftieth ratification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change entered into force and became an international legal instrument binding on its parties. As at 29 March 1994, the Convention has received 64 ratifications or accessions.

3. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change, mandated by the General Assembly in resolution 47/195, has continued to function in order to prepare for the first session of the Conference of the Parties and, in that context, held its sixth session at Geneva

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* E/CN.17/1994/1.

from 7 to 10 December 1992, its seventh session in New York from 15 to 20 March 1993, its eighth session at Geneva from 16 to 27 August 1993 and its ninth session at Geneva, from 7 to 18 February 1994.

4. Two more sessions, one at Geneva from 22 August to 2 September 1994 and the other in New York from 30 January to 17 February 1995, have been scheduled prior to the first session of the Conference of the Parties, which is to take place in Berlin from 28 March to 7 April 1995.

5. Based on the work programme drawn up by the Committee at its sixth session, the Committee has taken up a number of questions related to the implementation of the Convention. In accordance with the provisions of article 12 of the Convention, at its ninth session the Committee adopted decisions on the guidelines and methodologies to be used by developed country parties and other parties included in annex I to the Convention in preparing their first national communications. The Committee decided, in its discussion of the process for reviewing these communications, to carry out, on an interim basis, the most pressing tasks of the subsidiary bodies established by the Convention. The Committee has also initiated consideration on the adequacy of commitments; a large number of countries have emphasized the need for additional measures under the Convention to control greenhouse gas emissions beyond the year 2000.

6. Discussions are under way on the rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties, the financial mechanism of the Convention and criteria for joint implementation as provided by the Convention.

7. The interim secretariat of the Convention provides substantive support to the work of the Committee and carries out, on an interim basis, the secretariat functions referred to in the Convention. It collaborates with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/ World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Information Unit on Climate Change in promoting public awareness on climate change. It has developed with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), in collaboration with the secretariats of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a programme, the main objective of which is to provide training aimed at encouraging policy dialogue on national and subregional policies and measures in response to the provisions of the Convention. It is also developing, in a joint activity with UNEP, a project to coordinate support for national climate change activities and to improve the exchange of information thereon. In addition, it maintains collaborative relationships with a range of agencies, programmes and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. At its ninth session, the Committee endorsed the view that the interim secretariat should continue to function until 31 December 1995, and that the permanent secretariat should start up on 1 January 1996. Also at the ninth session, the Committee took note with satisfaction of the offer of the Government of Uruguay to host the permanent secretariat, and that of the Government of Switzerland to provide facilities to the permanent secretariat and to co-locate it with other secretariats.

II. CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

8. To date, 53 countries have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity, which has enabled the Convention to enter into force on 29 December 1993. Although most of the work undertaken between June 1992 and April 1994 has been of an organizational nature, it is providing the foundation that is needed to translate the Convention into implementation programmes.

9. Three particular areas of Agenda 21 are being addressed: (a) conservation of biodiversity; (b) sustainable use of biodiversity and biological resources; (c) transference of technology and equitable sharing of the benefits derived therefrom.

10. The Conference of Parties is expected to take decisions that will guide the implementation of the Convention. The necessary preparations are being developed to provide the Conference of Parties with the tools it needs. Those tools will result from the following activities:

(a) The Intergovernmental Committee for the Convention on Biological Diversity held its first meeting in October 1993, for the preparation of a wide range of matters to be decided by the contracting parties at the first meeting of the Conference of Parties scheduled from 28 November to 9 December 1994;

(b) As part of the preparatory process, the Intergovernmental Committee requested the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting of Scientific Experts on Biological Diversity, in Mexico, from 11 to 15 April 1994, at which preparations of the groundwork for the implementation of the Convention are expected to take place. More specifically, the following three agenda items will be discussed:

(i) Identification of scientific programmes and international cooperation in research;

(ii) Preparation of an agenda for scientific and technological research on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity;

(iii) Identification of innovative, efficient and state-of-the-art technology and know-how relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

11. The results of this meeting will be submitted to the Intergovernmental Committee, at its second meeting, scheduled to be held in Nairobi between 20 June and 1 July 1994.

12. The first meeting of the Conference of Parties will be held from 28 November to 9 December 1994. It is expected to take decisions on the financial, institutional and scientific mechanisms to be put in place in the early stages of operation of the Convention. This preparatory process is supported by an interim secretariat established under the aegis of UNEP.

III. NEGOTIATIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN THOSE COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING SERIOUS DROUGHT AND/OR DESERTIFICATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA

13. One of the important outcomes of the Rio Conference was the recommendation, made in Agenda 21, to elaborate an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, with a view to finalizing it by June 1994.

14. Accordingly, the General Assembly, by its resolution 47/188, established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. The Committee has held four sessions so far, with the fifth and final one scheduled to be held in Paris, from 6 to 18 June 1994.

15. Working against a tight schedule which allowed for little more than a year for substantive negotiations, the Committee and its two working groups made considerable progress in drafting a text of the Convention. Working on consecutively revised drafts produced by the Secretariat, the latest at the Committee's session at Geneva from 21 to 31 March 1994, the delegations succeeded in removing most of the brackets in the text, leaving a manageable document for the final round.

16. The major outstanding issues concern financial arrangements. An informal working group has been set up to try to develop a new approach: it will meet during the inter-sessional period.

17. The Committee also started negotiating a regional implementation annex for Africa. Together with annexes for other regions, such as Asia and Latin America, it will become an integral part of the Convention. The Secretariat will produce official texts of the other regional annexes for negotiation and adoption in June, a major but achievable challenge for the Committee.

18. The atmosphere in the Committee has been constructive and practical throughout, with a strong commitment of all participants to the success of the negotiations. While giving priority to Africa, the Convention stresses the global dimension of desertification and drought and the need for international cooperation and partnership in addressing the problem. A strong consensus emerged on an innovative bottom-up approach, where commitments at the national, regional and international levels reinforce local action.

19. The Convention to combat desertification will become an important component of a generation of environmental Conventions building upon Rio's sustainable development perspective, as well as on the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity. The indications are that success is within reach, and that the deadlines set in Rio will be honoured.

20. The negotiations are facilitated by the International Panel of Experts on desertification, whose establishment, to assist the Secretariat, was mandated by the General Assembly. The Panel, which held its fifth meeting in March 1994, provides important and continuous input on questions ranging from the format and content of the Convention to scientific comment on specific issues and linkages,

such as climate, biodiversity of dry lands, energy, water, and the socio-economic dimension.

21. The Secretariat provides support to national and regional preparatory studies in countries affected by drought and desertification in Africa, in Latin America and in Asia. The studies, funded by Governments and United Nations agencies, have been instrumental in focusing the interests of the developing countries in the negotiating process and mobilizing national activities. The methodology suggested by the Secretariat has been widely employed by Governments and regional organizations engaged in the studies.

22. The Secretariat has promoted the contribution of non-governmental organizations in the negotiations, and continues its efforts to keep the public and interested groups better informed of the substantive issues under discussion. It has also participated and helped to organize several international conferences in support of the negotiations.

IV. GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

23. The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will take place in Bridgetown, Barbados, from 25 April to 6 May 1994. The Barbados Conference is part of the process set in train by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which, through Agenda 21, acknowledged that as far as environment and development were concerned, small island developing States are a special case because of their ecologically fragile and vulnerable nature, small size, geographic isolation and limited resources. As a result, it was agreed that those States warranted special cooperation and assistance from the international community.

24. The Preparatory Committee established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/189 held its organizational session on 15-16 April 1993, and a substantive session on 30 August to 10 September 1993 and 7 to 11 March 1994.

25. As part of the preparatory process, two regional technical meetings were held. The first meeting, for the Indian and Pacific Oceans, was coordinated by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and was held in Vanuatu from 31 May to 4 June 1993. The second meeting, for the Atlantic/Caribbean/Mediterranean region was held in Trinidad and Tobago from 28 June to 2 July 1993. The meeting was coordinated by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), with assistance from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

26. Two major outcomes are expected from the Conference. These are the Declaration of Barbados and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

27. The draft programme of action covers such issues as climate change and sealevel rise, natural and environmental disasters, waste management, coastal and marine resources, freshwater, land resources and biodiversity, energy, science and technology, tourism, transportation, national and regional capacity-building, human resource development, and implementation.

28. Considerable progress has already been made in negotiating the two draft final documents referred to above. The Conference should be viewed as an important early test of the international community's determination to carry out the commitments and undertakings that were entered into at the Earth Summit.

V. UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON STRADDLING FISH STOCKS AND HIGHLY MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS

29. The United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks was convened in accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/192 of 22 December 1992. The first session of the Conference, which was held in New York from 19 to 23 April 1993, was devoted to organizational matters. The Conference held its first substantive session in New York from 12 to 30 July 1993.

30. During the substantive session, the Conference commenced consideration of its mandate, which was (a) to identify and assess existing problems related to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks; (b) to consider means of improving cooperation on fisheries among States; and (c) to formulate appropriate recommendations. Much of the work of that session was carried out in informal consultations. At the end of the session, the Chairman submitted a negotiated text (A/CONF.164/13), which reflected the progress made towards the formulation of appropriate recommendations as required by the mandate of the Conference.

31. The Conference recommended to the General Assembly that two further sessions be held in 1994. In accordance with that recommendation, the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/194, approved the convening in New York of two further sessions of the Conference, from 14 to 31 March 1994 and from 15 to 26 August 1994.

32. At its second substantive session, held in New York from 14 to 31 March 1994, the Conference completed a section-by-section examination of the negotiated text. Based on this examination, the Chairman began the revision of the negotiated text. These revisions were issued section by section in the form of five conference room papers. Informal consultations were then convened to further refine the revisions. The results of those consultations are contained in the revised text (A/CONF.164/13/Rev.1).

33. The Conference had established two working groups to deal with the issues of the precautionary approach to fisheries management and reference points for managing fish stocks. Background papers for these two issues were prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The results of the work done in the working groups is incorporated in the revised negotiated text.

34. There are still areas that require further negotiations, such as the scope of application of the instrument emanating from the Conference, the question of compatibility and coherence and the form of the instrument resulting from the Conference. Nevertheless, significant progress was made at the second session on all substantive matters.

35. The next substantive session of the Conference will be held in New York from 15 to 26 August 1994. At the time, the Conference is scheduled to conclude its work.